2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK3 Maritime Arab MK3
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SOME ASPECTS OF THE ARAB DHOW TRADE

Alan Villiers

K 506 439

AT THE end of 1939, there were 106 large ocean-going dhows on the registry of the Persian Gulf port of Kuwait. They averaged about 100 tons, the largest being 300 and the smallest about 75 tons, by European standards. Their average value, at that time, was perhaps 10,000 rupees, the approximate equivalent of $3,000. They made trading voyages with Iraqi dates, loaded in the Basra river, to the coasts of India and East Africa, generally making either two Indian, or one East African, voyage annually. The majority were in the trade to India, with an occasional diversion to East Africa. From India they were accustomed to bring back shipbuilding materials, coir for cordage, and Malabar teak; from East Africa they brought mangrove poles from either the delta of the Rufiji River, in Tanganyika, or from the port of Lamu, in Kenya Colony. These poles were used for building, and the dimensions of the rooms in most of the Kuwait houses depended upon the length of the mangrove poles brought from East Africa.

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In addition to these deep-sea dhows, there were also, at that time, between 100 and 150 pearlers, and some 50 or 60 smaller dhows in the local trade to the Basra river, many of them engaged in bringing fresh water (for Kuwait has no satisfactory supply of its own). New vessels were building at the rate of two or three a month, for deep-sea, and a similar number for coastwise trade.

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The port of Kuwait was then, and is still, the principal dhow-

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[v] ALAN VILLIERS, deep-sea sailor and author, spent over twelve months in 1938–39 studying firsthand the Arab dhow trade of the Persian Gulf and the coasts of southern Arabia and East Africa. His experiences are described in his *Seas of Sinbad*, published in 1940; Mr. Villiers here presents further information on the social and economic aspects of the trade.

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building and trading port of the Persian Gulf, though offering little trade itself. Its only real rival in the deep-sea trade was the ancient port of Sur, near Ras al-Hadd, on the Gulf of Oman. Figures for the port of Sur were unobtainable, but there must have been at least 100 deep-sea dhows sailing from there, the majority to Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Zanzibar. Several ports on the Trucial Coast of Oman also sent their quota of deep-sea ships to Africa and India; and Muscat and Mutrah Bay, and the ports of Lingeh and Qishm, in Iran, contributed a few. But the flag of Iran was a rarity in both Indian and African ports, compared with the Arab.

In addition to the Persian Gulf and Omani ports, Mukalla in the Hadhramaut, Ma'alla by Aden, Hodeida, Mocha, and Luhaiya in the Yemen, and Qizan on the coast of Asir in the Red Sea, all build and maintain considerable fleets of dhows. These I have seen, personally; there are many ports I was unable to visit. It is probable that the dhow trade round the Arab coasts employs upwards of 2,000 vessels of one sort or another, in which at least thirty or forty thousand men gain some sort of livelihood.

For many years, steamers of the British India Company have been trading in the Persian Gulf. Kuwait is still well served by steamers from Karachi, and an occasional long-voyage vessel used to put in from New York and London, even before the oil resources began to be exploited in 1940. American, German, Italian, and British lines, none of them likely to overlook any cargoes, all traded to the Gulf. The African East Coast and the Indian coasts are even better served. How is it, then, that a dhow trade of such importance still survives? How is it organized, and how managed?

One reason — perhaps the chief — why the ancient trade with the monsoons down the Indian Ocean not only survives but flourishes is that the dhows warehouse the goods they carry as well as transport them, and it suits the merchants better to have 10,000 packages of new season's dates divided among a fleet of dhows, than in the hold of one steamer which will unload the lot in a day or two, and flood the market. Ten thousand packages provide cargoes for at least five large dhows; the dhow master does not care how long he takes to discharge his cargo, for his overheads are trifling, his crew works on shares and handles all cargo, and

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his vessel pays practically no port dues. His dates can therefore be warehoused in the dhow, until the market can easily absorb them.

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The dhow trade is "native" trade, a stubborn plant which has been growing a long, long time. Nearly all the cargoes carried in dhows are for the native bazaars, and almost never for European account. Much of the cargoes consists of goods which the dhow captain himself, or some merchant or merchants travelling with him, sells for his own profit. The dhow is a peddler, as well as a carrier; a storehouse, as well as a ship; a means of livelihood to travelling merchants, as well as to her crew proper. Basra dates, though the most important outward cargo,[1] are only one source of revenue: there are a host of others, not necessarily always legitimate.

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Kuwaiti owners of date plantations on the nearby Basra river play a considerable part in the financing of deep-sea dhows, though in most cases the captains, called *nakhodas*, are at least the nominal owners. It suits the merchants well that the *nakhodas* should regard themselves as the owners, for this provides them with a cheap form of insurance. If the dhow be lost it is the *nakhoda's* loss, and not the merchant's, for the poor captain must pay back not only the value of the dhow but the advance of freight given him to finance his voyage. Since Islam forbids all forms of ordinary insurance, this arrangement is to the merchant's liking. The *nakhodas* must accept it, for in most cases there is no other way by which they can acquire a big dhow.

In Kuwait, immediately prior to the outbreak of World War II, there was beginning to be some restiveness about this, and an association of the *nakhodas* had the temerity to issue its demands upon the merchants. These included payment of demurrage when unduly delayed at the loading berths in Basra (a dhow might be kept for weeks waiting for her cargo), a sliding scale of freights for different ports instead of the customary flat rate of 1.5 or 2 rupees a package regardless of destination, liability for the return of advances to cease with the loss of the ship, two competent officers for every seagoing dhow, and so forth. The demands represente

[1] Crew requirements and the very measurements of the dhows themselves are reckoned in terms of dates. A sailor to each 100 packages is the general rule, in Kuwait, and a dhow is spoken of there as having a capacity for 2,000 packages of dates, rather than as being of 100 tons burden.

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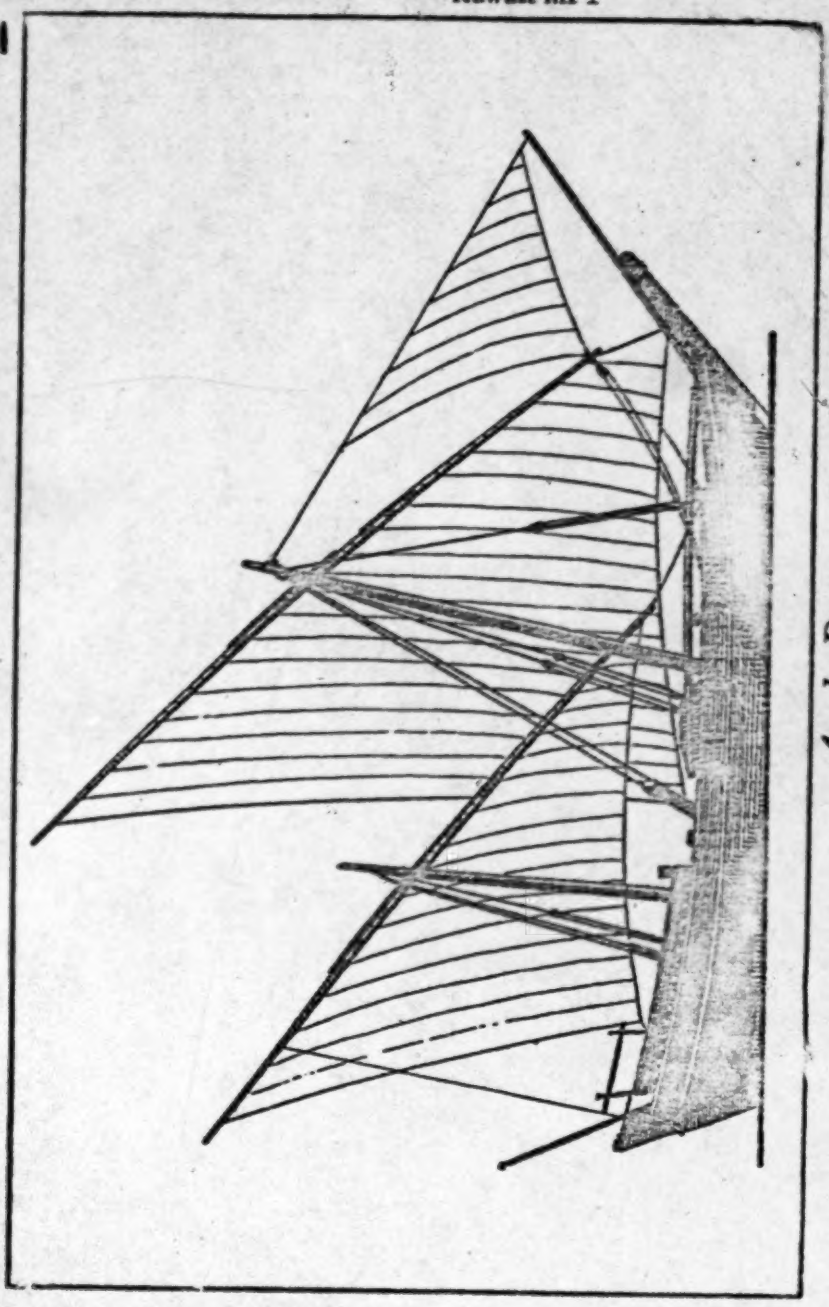

Arab Boom

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a bare minimun, surely, and no more than a nakhoda's right, but the merchants' answer was that if the nakhodas could make new rules, so also could they; and they had the real power. I do not think the attempt of the nakhodas got them very far.

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While the dates are generally carried both to India and East Africa on a freight basis, nearly all other cargo is bought to the ship's own account and peddled to best advantage. The merchants have a substantial share in the dhow's earnings, apart from the sailor's own ventures, which are limited to what they can stow in a sea chest on the poop. As far as I was able to discover -- and I was more than twelve months sailing in deep-sea dhows -- the freight from the dates, on the typical African voyage, is used to finance a cargo of salt from Aden and to purchase odds and ends which might earn a profit in the bazaars of the Benadir coast and Kenya Colony. At the same time, the dhow carries all the passengers she can prevail upon to make a voyage, anywhere, for the Arab of Oman, and the Hadhramaut in particular, is an inveterate wanderer, and every dhow is a passenger vessel by the mere possession of deck enough to lie upon.

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The salt is sold in the best market that offers between the Hadhramaut coast and Zanzibar. At the same time, the nakhoda does what trading he can in anything which he knows, from past experience, will command a market. The average dhow never leaves the Gulf without at least some carpets, allegedly Persian but generally of either Italian or English origin, which are used both as trade and as bribes. Cooking stones, ghee, live sheep, cows, sacks of rice and flour, dried fish, haberdashery of all sorts, brassware, cheap enamelware, Arab confectionery -- all these may be aboard, either as ship's ventures or as the crew's, generally the latter.

Every man of the crew concentrates on goods which can be bought cheaply in the free port of Aden, adulterated if possible in transit, and sold to the Somali or Swahili shopkeepers whose little stores abound in every port along the coast of East Africa, from Haifun in the north (which the Italians called Dante) to Mikindani in the south, which is about as far south as the Arabs sail in these days. Only Indian dhows go further, to Madagascar and the Comorin Islands. Gaily coloured turbans of the correct style

S. Villiers · T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

443 505 439 (for the manner of headdress worn in the different parts of Arabia and East Africa varies considerably; what will sell well at Mukalla, for instance, will find no buyers at Kuwait; and the Arab is a stickler for style), sarongs from Java and Japan, amber and artificial beads of the kind the true Moslem loves to fondle, cigarettes in gay packages but of no advertised brand, cheap perfumes (which I have several times seen the sailors laboriously adulterating with water from the ship's tanks), small crocheted caps to go under turbans, money belts, caps of artificial leather and pullovers of extremely artificial wool, veils for the harem, basketware from the Hadhramaut, sometimes a little hashish or *qat*[1] — these are the sailors' ventures, and the profits are their own.

The sailors are inveterate smugglers; almost none of the goods they bring — apart from the main cargo — is declared. Since they leave from small ports along the coast of Arabia where official supervision, while thorough, is not organized to conform with the Europeans' idea of how trade should be conducted, and since so much of their more highly dutiable goods are private ventures, such manifests as they produce to the authorities are useless. The mariner buys his goods himself, and sells them himself (though he does not mind disposing of them to boats alongside). He sees no point in accepting any official interference, and to him the European on the East African coast is still an interloper, recently arrived and wholly unnecessary.

505 484 486 The passenger trade is an important one, particularly in the East African voyaging. Though the Italians in their colonies tried to regulate the movement of Arabs, and the growth of Indian influence in Mombasa and Zanzibar has much lessened Arab trade and opportunities, still thousands of Omani and Hadhramaut Arabs travel down the Benadir coast and to Zanzibar annually. Every dhow fit to go to sea — and quite a few which look as if they are not — carries her quota, and some of the overcrowding is incredible. Among 35 Arab dhows which were lying together at Mogadishu, in Italian Somaliland, in the season of 1939, the Italian immigration authorities checked 4,000 passengers. They

[1] A bush common to southern Arabia, especially the Yemen. The leaves, when chewed, are somewhat intoxicating.

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missed at least another 600, for no list which the dhows supply is really reliable, and each ship carries many persons who are without European documents. As a new dhow arrives, sometimes dozens of her passengers will drop quietly over the side and disperse themselves among the dhows already in the harbour. As with the disposal of the seamen's ventures, all Arabs take a delight, regardless of their ports of origin, in the general defeat of European regulations.

II

At first glance, the whole deep-sea trade in dhows seems unorganized and almost unregulated. In point of fact, it is very well organized indeed, and has a tradition going back, probably, some thousands of years. There is no association of dhow owners in Arabia as there is a Country Craft Organization on the west coast of India, for the Arab of today is too inherently disunited and fiercely individualist to make this type of co-operation possible. But he can organize his own trade very well, nevertheless. The typical wealthy business family of Kuwait maintains offices, almost always managed by sons of the house who frequently rotate on the circuit, in all the more important centers of Arab coastal trade. The head office is at Kuwait or perhaps Basra, with branches at Aden (in the Crater, not at Steamer Point), Bombay, possibly one other west coast of India port, and Mukalla. Where there is not an actual branch of the family conducting business on a permanent footing, there is either a trusted agent (probably a relative), or one of the younger sons sent in the trading season to watch the family interests. This, for instance, is done at Berbera, in British Somaliland, which, when times are good, can absorb a surprising quantity of Iraqi dates carried there in dhows. The agent or family member is primarily responsible for the collection of debts — always a problem in a trade which is carried on without banking. A family carrying on business on such a scale will have a finger in perhaps a score big dhows, all nominally "owned" by their own *nakhodas*. The cash resources of some of these families must be enormous, and behind them stands the Sheikh of Kuwait, who was a wealthy man even before oil was discovered in his territory.

2. Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1949 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
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MA 471 426 565 When a deep-sea dhow is built, at least some of the money is put up by the *nakhoda* himself and his family. It is the first essential of the *nakhoda* that he should be from a family of standing in the community, which will pay its debts. Just why such families cannot finance a dhow by themselves I was unable to discover, but the Arab, apparently, has no objection to carrying on business under a cumbersome structure of debt. The merchant, backed by the Sheikh or the ruling family, backs the *nakhoda's* family, who support in turn a trusted and experienced member to take command of the dhow.

MA 565 871 857 It is customary for the boys in such families to go to sea while very young, but they never work as sailors. They are always privileged: no sailor can become a deep-sea *nakhoda*, since obviously if his family is of standing, he would never serve before the mast. The children sail with him sometimes from the age of six or seven, though not regularly. They will make one or two long voyages, looking on and learning but not actually doing anything; then they will remain at home a year or two before going out again. They take command very young. Schooling, at least in 1939, was normally restricted to the local Koranic schools, and rarely occupied more than three months in the year. Only merchants' sons went to the colleges of Iraq, Egypt, and Syria.

MA 545 554 505 Gradually the head of a *nakhoda's* family may attain the status of a lesser merchant himself, though his merchandise is generally limited to the wherewithal to build ships, which comes up in his own dhows from the Malabar coast. But a *nakhoda* himself almost never becomes a merchant, and a merchant's son never becomes a *nakhoda*. Nevertheless, the profession of conducting deep-sea dhows about the waters of the Indian Ocean is a highly respected one, and the shipmasters of Kuwait are, on MA [487] the whole, a very competent and knowledgeable class, though few of them can practice much astronomical navigation. Even their long voyages down to Zanzibar or to Calicut are coasting, really down with one monsoon, and back with the other, almost always in sight of land. Their real ability consists in their local knowledge, both of ports and trade.

K MA 505 565 In Kuwait, in 1939 — as now — there were upwards of 10,000 qualified deep-sea sailors. An astonishingly high proportion is of

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Negro origin, the descendants of slaves, though not now slaves themselves. Many others are of Iranian origin. Almost none are Bedouin, for the Arab Bedouin is not a seafaring man. In Kuwait, the callings open to the low-class Iranian are restricted to portering, pearling (either as diver or as tender), and sailing. Both Iranians and Negroes work splendidly, are loyal, competent, and well disciplined.

As the *nakhoda* class is tied to the merchant by a structure of debt, so also are the sailors tied to the *nakhoda* class in the same way. All deep-sea sailing is paid for on a shares system, and there are no wages. Often the *nakhoda* of the deep-sea dhow has an interest in a pearling vessel (though not now to anything like the same extent as in former years), and the sailor may be bound to him through pearling debts, either his own or inherited. The more iniquitous practices in the pearling business structure have long been on the way out, largely because of the excellent example set at Bahrein, but the debt tradition stands and is almost impossible to eradicate.

The sailors go to sea because they know no other life, and they make a wretched living by incredibly difficult methods. They have no possessions other than the clothes they stand in, and one or two spare gowns, a good headcloth, and a few sarongs. Their toothbrush is the twig of a tree; their ablutions are made five times daily at a mosque well, or in the sea; they know no shelter and rarely have a bed. The younger seamen, I have noticed, often have no home other than the *suq*, or native bazaar, where they coil down in their rough cloaks for a night's sleep on a bench in a cheap coffee shop, or in the sand. At sea, they stretch out on the deck, beneath the stars, for there is no such thing as accommodation for the seamen or anyone else in most dhows. The officers and the more important merchants live on a bench round the wheel, in the stern of the ship; the seamen lie down anywhere.

What keeps the seaman a disciplined and more or less contented worker is his hope of reward, principally from smuggling or his own ventures, and his ambition to get hold of a tiny shop in the *suq* of his home town. This is an ambition he rarely achieves. His more usual fate is to die young, especially if he be also a pearl diver.

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000 K MA 228 also a pearl diver. Pearling from Kuwait and Bahrein is carried on during the season of the hard southwest monsoon in the Indian Ocean, when the big dhows are laid up and there is no ocean sailing. It is therefore possible for the same men to carry on both callings, though in these days the seaman is becoming a little too enlightened to go off cheerfully to the purgatory of pearling.

MA 565 581 595 The seaman is also helped by his religion, by his interest in the seafaring life (which has a great appeal of its own) and the fine camaraderie about it, and in many cases by the delights of night life in such ports as Zanzibar and Bombay. If he has no harem of his own back in Kuwait, he is certainly no celibate at Zanzibar. He generally seems to manage a small home in Kuwait after a few voyages, depending upon his own business acumen and the general success of the dhow he serves in. Many *nakhodas* appear to maintain several.

MA 505 565 In addition to the merchants, *nakhodas*, and seamen, there is another class of importance in the dhow trade. These are the mates, the experienced officers who, never able to become *nakhodas* themselves because of an unacceptable financial status, very often have more to do with the actual sailing of the dhow than the *nakhoda*. Each big dhow carries at least one such experienced man. Sometimes he is of Iranian origin, and has been sailing since he could walk. Sometimes he is a Negro, member of a trusted ex-slave family, who lives with the *nakhoda* at home or has been brought up in his courtyard.

MA 505 565 439 He is always an able mariner, but he is not often trusted to trade. It is not at all uncommon for a *nakhoda*, on the usual East African voyage — which always begins with a long haul and long-winded peddling of dates round the coasts of Southern Arabia, and to Berbera and perhaps Djibouti — to leave the ship for considerable portions of the passage at sea, while he looks after her business interests ashore. For example, in one Kuwait dhow in which I had the good fortune to sail for some eight months, the *nakhoda* cheerfully left the ship at Aden and went on to Mukalla by steamer, to steal a march on the other shipmasters and scoop the cream — he hoped — from the passenger market. Again, he left the ship at Zanzibar, and his mate took her down to the delta of the Rufiji, hauled her out on the beach at Kwale Island south

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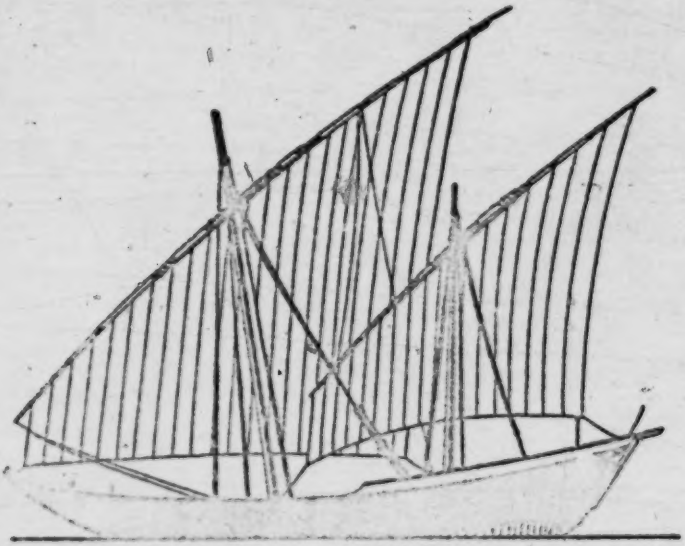
of Dar es Salaam, loaded her with mangrove poles, and brought her back to Zanzibar again, where the *nakhoda* had ostensibly been trying to assemble passengers and extra cargo for the return to Arabia but in fact had been enjoying a new harem.

Mates are paid by shares, and are, in my opinion, an oppressed class. They carry their own ventures, engage in smuggling on a



Baggala

small scale — haberdashery, currency, and so forth — and generally keep the ship's books. They may become *nakhodas* of small *booms*, running to the Basra river; but it is unusual for a man from the more dignified deep-sea trades to descend to this. There is no social status about the *nakhoda* of a coastwise water dhow.

Ships are built by shipwrights who employ no naval architects. Both builders and riggers' lofts are unknown. The ships are put together entirely by eye and take the traditional form either of the double-ended *boom*, or the carved and embellished *baggala*, which obviously has a considerable ancestry from the Portuguese galleon.

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
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galleon. *Baggalas*, being both costly to build and unwieldy in a seaway, are now unfashionable. A *boom* is both cheaper and much easier to build, and carries just as much. Her sharp stern makes her safer in a seaway, though it is no part of her builder's plan that her *nakhodas* will try her qualities in a storm. Their sailing, he hopes, will be confined to sunny seas and more or less favorable winds; therefore the clumsy lateen rig will do.

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The lateen is awkward but cheap; it demands a big crew, but these are cheap, too, for they are the sailmakers and riggers as well as mariners, and their only cost is an agreed share in the ship's earnings. The lateen is a grand pulling sail, and the dhows sail handsomely in their own conditions. There is nothing clumsy about them, though their fish-oiled hulls smell abominably and their underwater bodies are preserved by a mixture of tallow and lime, rubbed on by hand and renewed quarterly. The sailors do this work, as well as handle all the cargoes, keep the passengers in order and extol the merits of their ship so that more passengers might sail with her, tow the ship with her own longboat and propel the smaller dhows by sweeps, in calms, and fight for her if need be. The Kuwait dhows today are never armed, though the Suri may be.

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III

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A brief description of my personal experiences will serve to illustrate a typical East African voyage.[1] I sailed in a Kuwait dhow of the *boom* type, a vessel of 2,000 date-packages capacity — perhaps 150 tons — which had a crew of twenty-eight. She carried something between 120 and 180 passengers, although her hold was full of salt and rice, and her decks were already crowded with a large longboat, a small gig, and a dhow under construction for sale at Lamu.

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I joined the vessel at Ma'alla, the native port of Aden. She had already been several months at sea, peddling a full cargo of dates from Fao (by the mouth of the Basra river) around the coast of the Hadhramaut, and to Berbera. When I joined her, she had been hauled out on the beach at Ma'alla and her bottom

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[1] The voyage here summarized is described in detail in the author's *Sons of Sinbad* (New York, 1940).

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repayed, and already was loaded with her cargo of salt and rice in sacks, and some mysterious parcels on deck for the Sultan of Mukalla. All her crew had their sea chests filled with trade goods from the cheap *suq* in the Crater at Aden; her carpenter was at work on a 40-foot dhow for sale on the voyage; and she had shipped several Suri and Omani merchants, from Aden, bound on a general trading voyage on their own account, wherever the dhow might take them.

We sailed first to Mukalla and Shihr, where we embarked passengers (the fare was eight rupees regardless of destination, the passengers providing their own food and looking after themselves entirely) and some further cargo. This consisted mainly of a parcel of condemned dates which it was hoped to sell to the Somali (or failing that, to feed to the Swahili labor in the Rufiji Delta, when loading mangrove poles), some dried shark which smelled high even aboard the dhow, some cooking stones, and a considerable quantity of basketware.

With this lot aboard, and the *nakhoda* pessimistic and depressed at the small number of passengers, though his dhow appeared crowded, we sailed first to Haifun, a salt port on the northeastern coast of Italian Somaliland. There we anchored among a fleet of dhows, and did nothing at all for some time. Finally, some rice was sold, some haberdashery smuggled into boats which the local Somali brought alongside, and lot of fish caught and dried. Then we went on to Mogadishu, running down the coast with the northeast monsoon. At Haifun another Kuwait ship was caught smuggling and heavily fined; and all the Kuwaiti in the harbour contributed to pay the fine. At Mogadishu, it was hoped to land a hundred or so passengers, but the Italians would not permit them to disembark. Trade there was extremely difficult, and little could be done. Some of the merchants left, as far as I could gather, to try to collect debts owing to them from previous voyages. Some smuggling went on (I saw a lovely carpet change hands), some of our passengers melted away and their places were taken by others, equally undocumented.

After a week or ten days we passed on down the coast to Lamu. Here more passengers landed and there was a determined attempt to sell the new dhow which the carpenter had completed. She

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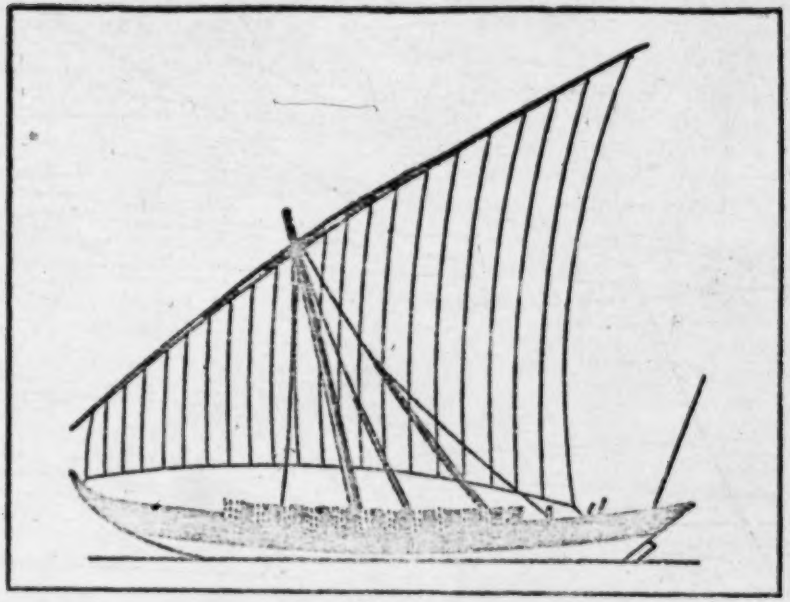

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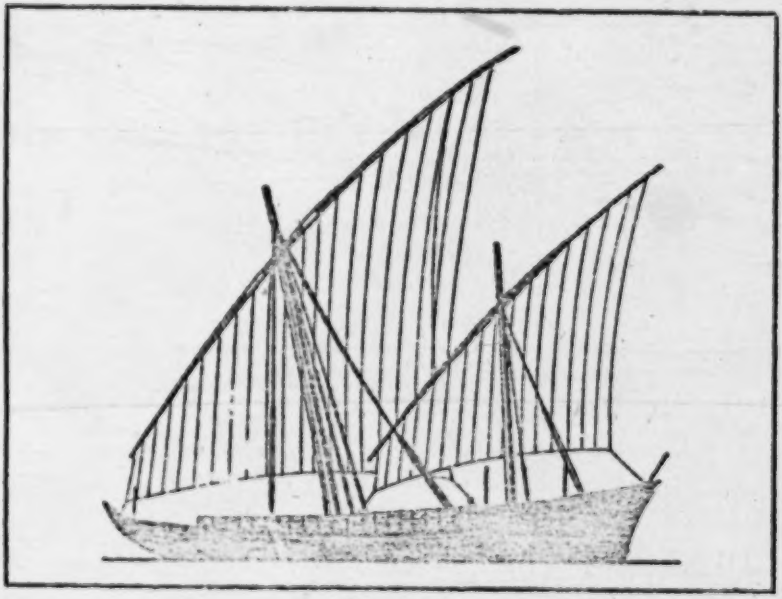

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K MA 501 439 435 was a lovely little vessel which could carry some fifteen tons. The price asked was 1,000 East African shillings, or about $240. At that price, there was no buyer; she finally changed hands at 700 shillings. Lamu was a mangrove-pole port, but I gathered the trade was rather too well regulated for our nakhoda's taste, and we bought nothing.

K MA 439 505 Next came Mombasa, a port with a large dhow trade. Some figures I saw in the Report of the General Manager on the Administration of the Railways and Harbours (Kenya and Uganda) showed that the dhow trade was increasing, rather than diminishing. The latest returns I say, for the year ended December 31, 1937, showed that 1,427 dhows had arrived at Mombasa, an increase of ten percent on the previous year. These 1,427 dhows were computed to register -- if they had been registered -- nearly 40,000 tons. Many were Swahili, from Lamu and Zanzibar, but a large proportion was Arab. There was a native harbor set aside for them, and here we sold salt, landing it in our own longboat.

K MA [574] We got rid of our surviving passengers, gave feasts to merchants and officials of the native harbor (these were a great feature of the voyage, and were always accompanied by much monotonous singing and dancing), gathered tidings from brother nakhodas from Kuwait and Sur about trade prospects further south, collected debts, and finally departed toward Zanzibar.

K MA 501 396 439 There were three Indian and one Iranian deep-sea dhows in the port at Mombasa. The Iranian was an enormous vessel of over 400 tons -- the largest dhow I saw anywhere. She was a boom and had been built at Kuwait, but the Kuwaiti sold her because they found such large vessels uneconomic, in bad times, for the mere reason of their two great capacity. They brought too much to sell, when the market was depressed, and they could not wait indenfinitely to dispose of their cargoes because their overhead was too high, despite the fact that everything possible was done to keep down building costs, even to the sending of Kuwaiti shipwrights to the Malabar coast to build big vessels there, rather than carry the timber to Kuwait.

K MA 439 Zanzibar, at that season of the year, was an even busier Arab port than Mombasa. In the first month of the northeast season, over a hundred ocean-going dhows had arrived at Zanzibar, most

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
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of them Arab. I noticed in the registry office of the Customs building that some were entered as Somali, and a few were registered in the Hadhramaut. No longer did they bring down picturesque cargoes of myrrh and frankincense (if they ever did) or ship out slaves and ivory, ambergris and hippopotamus teeth. They brought salt and dried fish; and when they came, the quantities of hashish and other drugs in the town showed a significant increase. They loaded little at Zanzibar for the homeward voyage, but went on down to the coast of Tanganyika.

We completed the discharge of our outward goods at Zanzibar, and the crew busied itself for weeks selling Hadhramaut basketware and Aden haberdashery — port of origin, Yokohama. When we sailed, leaving our *nakhoda* behind, our only cargo was the parcel of condemned dates, which the Somali would not have. We passed on down to the delta of the Rufiji River, a place given up to mosquitoes, malignant malaria fever, monkeys, sad Swahili, rain, and the best mangrove poles in the world. Here we lay six weeks, while a cargo of some 142 score of poles was laboriously cut and loaded. For this work, Swahili were engaged to help our crew, and at last the bad dates found consumers. The mangrove poles were ferried out in the dhow's longboat, and paid for in silver shillings to a white supervisor. There were some twenty dhows loading in the Rufiji delta at the time, all for the Persian Gulf.

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It struck me as strange that the dhow should spend so much time embarking a cargo in which the total investment was less than $500, for no matter how I tried to figure things out, I did not see how it could possibly be worth her while to haul such a paltry cargo so long a distance, or how she could make enough from it to show a reasonable profit on the voyage. There was certainly something mysterious about this mangrove pole business, and the white supervisor, energetic as he was, by no means knew all that went on. I noticed later, when we sold our cargo to King Ibn Saud's agents at Bahrein for use in a new palace at Riyadh, that the Arab receipt was for 295 score, and the price paid, over 4,000 rupees, approximated $1,200.

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There was some attempt in Zanzibar to regulate the dhow traffic, and precautions were taken to see that there was no slaving, under any guise. A local act requires that evidence be shown

that any new crew members in Arab ships joined voluntarily; vessels must not be overmanned, and crew and passenger lists must be provided and in order; ships must be surveyed, and kept seaworthy; and *nakhodas* must be certificated. As for the last, the port officials conduct examinations, and the general principle seems to be that if a man is capable enough to bring a dhow down to Zanzibar, certificate or no certificate, he can also be trusted to sail her away again. But the fee for examination is fifteen shillings, and the Arabs complain about it.

We touched at Zanzibar again after loading in the Rufiji, re-embarked our *nakhoda* and took aboard a few Swahili school-teachers as passengers (they proposed to hire an automobile at Kuwait to take them to Mecca), filled the decks with coconuts and cases of soap and vermicelli, and departed toward the Persian Gulf again with the first of the broken weather at the end of the northeast season. We did not await the coming of the true south-west monsoons, for it sets in hard; we sailed direct to Muscat, in twenty-six days.

Muscat was depressed and there was no trade there, not even smuggling. All that changed hands, as far as I could see, was a box of Maria Theresa thalers, enormous Austrian coins minted in London for the Omani and available in Zanzibar at a price less than the exchange rate in Muscat. The Arabs turned everything to profit and were prepared to sell anything, even the ship. The sailors' pastime in the Rufiji was buying lemons — a thousand for a shilling — and converting them into sherbet, which they hawked in the *suq* at Kuwait throughout the summer.

Our cargo of mangrove poles sold at Bahrein, the ship returned to Kuwait, to lay up inside a coral breakwater until the new season's Iraqi dates ripened and it was time to go out again. At Kuwait, when all her people were returned — several relations of the *nakhoda* had dispersed from Zanzibar back to Lamu and Mogadishu to collect debts — a general balance sheet of the whole round voyage was struck, the profits computed carefully, and divided by a system of shares arranged traditionally. It was not a straightforward statement of income and expenditure; I never saw or heard of any piece of Arab seafaring business which was as simple as that. It was all complicated by prior advances,

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MSS Maritime Arabs MK2
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K MA 451 465 439 505 debts, odd earnings not shared and even odder earnings which were shared, and mysterious complicated procedures, some of which I never did fathom, for the war came, and stopped my investigations.

The son of the merchant family which owned our dhow, however, told me that her gross profit on the nine-month round voyage was 11,000 rupees, not including the proceeds of the crews' and officers' private ventures. But I think he exaggerated, for the total investment in the dhow was little more than that. But at any rate, the dhow's people were well satisfied and they all, K MA [595] save one, went back to sea with her. The *nakhoda* grew fat throughout the summer, and took a new wife, and a new *boom* for his brother at a cost of 10,500 rupees; and I heard no complaints from the merchants.

K MA 505 465 501 439 As far as I was able to discover, half the gross earnings went to the ship; this was the merchant's share. The cost of the food for the round voyage (which was not much, for all hands lived very simply and fishing lines were the most important equipment in what passed for her storeroom) was deducted from the other half, and the remainder was then divided by shares arranged strictly in accordance with the accepted value of each man's rating aboard. The sailor's share on the voyage which I made was reported to be 135 rupees (about $40), whereof 35 rupees had been advanced. This was little enough for such a long voyage, and though they worked hard at all sorts of things and were ready for any kind of business, I doubt whether a sailor's earnings from other sources amounted to more than 20 or 30 rupees, clear.

K MA 465 506 181 I heard of dhows from Kuwait that season which were distributing less than 100 rupees; according to the Kuwaiti, who had no high opinion of them, the Suri rarely paid out more than fifty. To a sailor whose only home was the sand of the *suq* and his bed the cloak around him, whose wants were few and whose paradise was assured, even 50 rupees may be a vast sum of money. There was, at any rate, contentment throughout the Arab shipping industry as I knew it, and the quiet philosophy I learned among the simple seamen was of great help to me in the days of the long-drawn war which was soon to follow.